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CHRISTIAN UNION

ITS

MORAL OBLIGATION,

AND

THE ONLY MODE OF ATTAINING IT

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# CHRISTIAN UNION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

#### THE DESIRABLENESS AND POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN UNION.

IN regard to the desirableness of Christian Union, one overmastering sentiment is beginning to prevail. UNION is the watchword ringing through the various encampments of the Lord's hosts. The gates of heathen nations, opening of their own accord for the ingoing of the gospel, call for the increased strength of combined Christian effort.

The Spirit of Jesus beseeches us not to sow the seeds of division on foreign soil.

The subtle questionings of Infidelity render it important that all of the witnesses of Christ "speak the same things."

The bright outshining of celestial Truth, streaming down upon us from above, is revealing the broad expanse of our common Faith, and showing us clearly the line where Earth

mingles with the Sky. Men see where revelation ends and speculation begins. Christianity is divesting itself of the straight-laced bigotry which has impeded its movement, and is extending the right hand of aid and sympathy to the poor and outcast. Already a day has been set apart by Christians of various names to pray for the "Unity of the Spirit." Prayers are now ascending that believers may all "be made perfect in one."

Many ministers of reconciliation are eagerly looking forth to behold the incoming of the glorious vision when the watchmen upon the towers shall see eye to eye.

Cordial Christian union is not a poetic dream, but an attainable reality. The basis of Faith is one, and is as changeless as God.

There is but one Bible through which that Faith is revealed. One Spirit is sent to dwell in the hearts of all believers. The same sacred fire burns on the altar of every regenerate heart. Moreover, the gospel, which is a practicable system of doctrine, contemplates Christian union. The Saviour himself prays that his followers "all may be one." The conversion of the world, which is promised as a certainty, is sequent on the oneness of believers. Union is the passage-way which leads to extension. The Saviour prays that "all may be

one," in order that "THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE." The two sustain the relation to each other of antecedent and consequent. In proportion as union prevails, the triumphs of the gospel will multiply. Both results are embraced in the petition of Him whom the Father always hears. The revealed system of tactics by which all the scattered bands of Zion can manœuvre in harmony together is the order of discipline and the kind of evolution which leads to victory and universal conquest.

The capacity of Christianity in this respect has been proved. At its outset in the world the whole "multitude"\* of believers "were of one heart." On the eve of its initiatory triumph, "all"† of its adherents "were of one accord." It was by thus "continuing"‡ that they "filled Jerusalem with their doctrine."§ Love is prescribed as the badge of discipleship.

Union is the burden of apostolic teaching. The Holy Spirit, by the pen of the apostle Paul, exhorts the Christians of Rome, of Corinth, of Galatia, of Ephesus, of Philippi, of Colosse, and of Thessalonica, to union;|| and the injunction given by the same Spirit through the apostle

\* Acts iv. 32.

† Acts ii. 4.

‡ Acts ii. 46.

§ Acts v. 28.

|| Rom. xii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 10; xii. 12. Gal. iii. 28. Eph. iv. 3. Phil. ii. 3. Col. iii. 11-14. 1 Thes. iii. 12; iv. 9.

John is "love one another." Discord is conclusive proof of practical error, disguise and extenuate the matter as we will. The unqualified command of the Eternal Spirit to all is that they "stand fast\* in one Spirit, wrestling with one soul for the faith of the gospel."

The kind of agreement which is contemplated is not artificial confederation, but sympathetic union. Hands must co-operate and hearts beat together. Union, therefore, is not only practicable but imperative; the world needs it, all true Christians desire it, and God commands it. What he says to every individual Christian he virtually says to each alienated and belligerent band: "*If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*" The work of mutual reconciliation is first. Consistency, Efficiency, and Duty demand Union. Every loving heart cries out, "Give me back my brethren—their confidence, their love, their co-operation."

The differences which now exist among Christians of different names arise in some cases from radically conflicting views.

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\* Phil. i. 27.

The old classification of men into believers and unbelievers cannot be much improved. Names are of little consequence, and variable; but the old phases of human thought constantly reappear like the changing moon, now waxing, now waning, now clear and unmistakable, now wrapped in clouds and mists,—always the same in reality, in appearance different.

Christianity and Rationalism are two antagonistic systems. The introduction of elements which belong to the latter into the former is a fruitful source of theoretical disagreement in religion. Faith and Philosophy have different spheres, as Chemistry and Physiology are separate sciences. Chemical tests will not elucidate the vital principle, nor produce animal and vegetable growth. Faith is a living organism, having its root in Revelation. Cutting and pruning with carnal implements does not improve its symmetry, but deadens its growth. Every incision is a wound that diminishes vitality; every addition is a noxious burden which the living forces must struggle to remove. These two systems do not often appear to stand length and breadth opposed to each other in hostile array,—the whole of one against the whole of the other. The warfare is representative, a principle in one making incursion into the domain of the other, and capturing if possible the seat of power.

One class of differences that exists in denominational creeds arises from the incorporation of rationalistic sentiments which form no part of Christianity, but on the other hand subtract from its energy and cripple its efficiency. They are sometimes assumed and sometimes expressed, but most operative when least observed. False assumptions are more dangerous than conclusions deduced from premises by argument, because they are more liable to escape scrutiny and detection.

Different codes of interpretation must lead to irreconcilable conclusions. The imperfections of language lead to some misapprehensions.

A great deal of human belief is hereditary. Prejudice begets many errors; pride of opinion nurtures and propagates them.

To adjust these deep laid differences, the foundations of rival systems of belief must be carefully inspected.

Another class of differences to which our attention in the following pages will be exclusively confined, may be denominated superficial differences; not that their origin is different from the preceding, but the facilities for reconciliation lie quite on the surface of things. All of the essential means of immediate adjustment are already at hand. The parties stand like two propositions of a syllogism with a middle

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term between them. The difference is more practical than theoretical. The chasm which separates them is so narrow that it can be bridged by a little friendly consultation. Their views, so far as is necessary to the most perfect harmony, are commensurable. A fundamental truth admitted by both lies between them. No new light is needed ; no more links in the chain of argument need to be forged. The differences belonging to this class are by far the most palpable, and therefore call most loudly for harmonious adjustment. They keep members of the same church from cordial fellowship, and rear strong barriers between Christians of different denominations.

In seeking reconciliation, it is generally wise for the parties not to take the highest ground which they could maintain, but the lowest ; and if on the lowest ground it is found that the differences can be adjusted, the radical errors of either party will soon be abandoned. A temperate and conciliatory spirit is desirable. A turning of the mind towards the means of reconciliation, with the effort to make the difference as little as possible, while it neither injures nor endangers truth, promotes the spirit of union.

The question involved is one of practical morality. The disagreement arises in conse-



quence of inharmonious views of duty. A rule of action which would enable Christians to coalesce in a single point of difference would apply to all similar disagreements.

To develop and apply this principle is attempted in the following pages. Their perusal will be found most profitable to those who possess and exercise two qualities of mind which are always desirable and always lovely. The first is an intense love of Truth rising above sectarian animosities, and walking in conscious dignity over party names and human conventionalisms. Moral truth must not be met simply with the cool bow of respectful recognition, but be received into the affections with a loving embrace. Still more desirable is a spirit of cordial regard for the brethren linked together in moral relations. This prerequisite is so very important that an inspired apostle saw fit to commend it to the notice of his brethren by special remark, when he discoursed to them upon the same theme: "Knowledge puffeth up, but Love buildeth up." It may be expected that this subject will yield the richest harvest of benefit to those who love the truth, both in its theoretical discussion and in its practical application.

Outward uniformity is not union. Persons standing or sitting in the same attitude may

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cherish the most radical differences of sentiment. Churches with a similar ritual may have no heartfelt sympathy. The unity of the Spirit may lead and doubtless would lead to oneness of form, organization and worship, but outward organic similarity will not produce internal unity. The union which is desirable is not one of creeds and confessions, but of sentiment, and sympathy, and life. Anything less than a union which God has joined together is an empty name. The unity of the Spirit implies likeness in all those hallowed graces which are supernaturally produced in the soul, such as love, faith, and hope. It comprehends union of sentiment, of emotion, and of action. As the work of God in the soul is carried on by the combined action of the Truth and the Holy Spirit working together, the one as agent and the other as his chosen instrument, it follows that all substantial Christian union is based in the Truth received, acknowledged, and loved. It unites so far as there is a right moral perception carried out in uniform convictions of duty with cordial love.

## CHAPTER II.

### STATEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLE FOR THE ADJUSTMENT OF DIFFERENCES.

DIFFERENCES of opinion did exist among Christians of the apostolic age. Antidotes to check their pernicious tendency and prevent their impairing the unity of belief were speedily provided. In the unfolding of the system of redemption, a representative case of disagreement in practical morality arose in the church at Corinth, in the settlement of which the principle that should decide all similar cases is most clearly developed. It is of such a nature as to be indispensable to Christian union wherever knowledge is imperfect, and as long as conscientious convictions are divergent. It stands in revealed religion, like a beacon on a rocky shore, a safe guide for the faithful in all ages.

In those times, before the fires on heathen altars had gone out, when idolatrous sacrifices were offered, it was customary to lay only a part of the animal upon the burning wood to be consumed by fire. The remainder was reserved for food. A portion of these remnants belonged to the priest, and another portion to

the person who brought the offering. Each party disposed of his share as he chose. Accordingly this meat was sometimes eaten at feasts holden in the temple or in private houses, and sometimes it was sold in the markets. Christians were thus constantly liable to meet with these remnants of idolatrous sacrifices. Among the Jews the eating of them was considered an abomination, and offenders were punished as idolaters. The Christians also had been instructed by the "decrees that were ordained of the Apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem, *to abstain from meats offered in sacrifice to idols.*" It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the Christians considered the eating of the meat once offered in a heathen temple to be idolatrous and sinful. Others took a more philosophical view, and reasoned about the validity of the prohibition. They were firmly persuaded that a heathen deity had no real existence; therefore they considered the meat as neither better nor worse for having been offered to idols. In their view it remained unchanged; it was not the less palatable; it was not the less wholesome. There appeared to be no good reason why they should abstain from a luxury so harmless; they accordingly ate the meat without hesitation or scruple. The consequences of disregarding the aposto-

lie injunction were pernicious. Some of the members of the church who were less philosophical, and, perhaps, less intelligent, enticed by appetite, and encouraged by the example of those whose piety and knowledge they respected, were induced to eat in violation of their convictions of what was right. Those of liberal views did no wrong to their consciences and received no felt harm. Those whose power of conscience was weaker than their appetites, disobeyed its monitions, and received a permanent moral injury. Moreover, a bad precedent had been introduced. Skepticism, incipient skepticism, had entered the Church. A wholesome, inspired precept, had been set aside, on speculative considerations. Arrogant Reason had invaded the domain of Faith, and plundered it of one inspired precept, because the ground of its claim was not obvious.

God commissioned the Apostle Paul to rectify the disorder by setting forth the rule which ought to have governed their conduct. It is applicable to the most numerous class of differences that are wont to arise among Christians. The rule rests upon the authority of Heaven, and it may thus be stated in a general form.

*Discretionary practices ought to be given up, if they imperil the consciences of the scrupulous.* The principle is based on the superior dignity

and authority of conscience in the human soul. A course of action which is believed to be right by many who wish to pursue it, but which is not imperatively enjoined, ought to be abandoned if its adoption is liable to tempt a Christian of weak conscience to do what he believes to be wrong. The apostle teaches that the preferences of one man which arise from taste, inclination, convenience or caprice, should give way to the convictions of another man which are enforced by conscience. As in the individual the claims of conscience are more authoritative than the solicitations of appetite, so in Christian society the conscience of a single individual is to hold in abeyance the wishes of the multitude. Non-essentials must be given up for the sake of moral safety and Christian union. Whoever from personal taste, sectarian bigotry, or party zeal, refuses to make such concession, sins against Christ, and sets his law aside.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE PRINCIPLE CONFIRMED.

THE solution which the Holy Spirit makes of the difficulty that arose in the Corinthian Church sanctions a principle which claims innumerable applications. It was doubtless designed to be a universal principle of Christian morality. Cogent reasons warrant this conclusion. The brief consideration of some of these will keep the general truth before the mind, and give us confidence in its validity and importance. The ocean grows sublime as we walk thoughtfully along its sounding shore. The mountains roll down upon our spirits grandeur and inspiration as we gaze upon their majestic outline; so thought becomes impressive as we muse upon it, and measure its bearings.

The apostle's mode of treating the question gives his decision the authority of a governmental precedent. A plain command from Paul in his apostolic character would have settled this particular difficulty. The citation of the decrees ordained by the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem would have been pertinent and bind-

ing. The question, however, is decided on other grounds. The broad foundations on which it rests are shown. Substantial reasons are given to establish what had at first been presented for the acceptance of an unquestioning faith. The prohibition is shown to be not arbitrary, but benevolent and wise. It is conceded that the eating of the meat is of itself indifferent; "for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse." To go and dine at the heathen temple, therefore, seemed in itself as harmless as to dine at home. He who had no conscientious scruples in respect to the idol went, avoided the appearance of singularity, enjoyed the repast, and felt sure that no harm was done to himself. To those liberal-minded Christians a caution was given. "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak." In other words, Beware lest this self-authorized license lead you into sin. The prohibition is based upon the fact that spiritual detriment impends the weak brethren in consequence of their following an unsafe example. For the *unscrupulous* to go to a feast at an idolatrous temple may be agreeable; but for them to stay at home is not wrong. If they remain at home, they will be deprived of no spiritual good; if they go, they will thereby



inflict upon those who are unstable much spiritual harm. "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." The Holy Spirit herein teaches that a temporal enjoyment, which endangers the integrity of a Christian conscience in another, ought to be passed by, untasted. This authoritative precedent has the force of supreme and universal law.

The same principle of morality is inculcated in other parts of the New Testament in the language of general statement. In his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle urges the adoption of this rule, "that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."\* What was believed by some to be right was thought by others to be doubtful or wrong. Disagreement and want of mutual confidence was the actual result. The difficulty was so great and lamentable in Heaven's estimation that the Spirit of inspiration was sent to set it right. The decision which is given is therefore as binding in authority as it is unambiguous in statement. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." A more unequivocal statement of a universal

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\* Rom. xiv. 13.

principle cannot be made. In regard to the import of the language there can be no doubt, for we find it illustrated in the conduct of the Apostle himself. In indifferent matters,\* unto the Jews he became a Jew, to them that are under the law as under the law, and to the weak he became as weak. Accordingly he circumcised Timothy to remove the prejudices of the Jews. On another occasion he illustrates the limitation to which this rule of concession is necessarily subject by refusing to allow Titus to be circumcised. His views did not change. The circumstances in the two cases were different; his conduct equally consistent in both. When Timothy was circumcised, his mother being a Jewess, no principle of the gospel was in danger of being misunderstood in consequence, and the observance of this Jewish rite afforded a passport through the synagogue to many who would else have been utterly inaccessible. In the case of Titus different circumstances called for different action. Circumcision was insisted upon as imperatively enjoined by the gospel. To admit it by circumcising Titus, who was a Gentile, was to sanction the corruption of the gospel by ingrafting upon it the Jewish ritual as an essential part of the system of faith. The

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\* 1 Cor. ix. 20.

matter was no longer non-essential, but pregnant with significance. The purity of the gospel was at stake. Here Paul was as inflexible and unyielding as a rock. To the imperious demands of the Judaizing teachers he gave no place by subjection for a moment. Human conventionalities are negotiable, but Divine injunctions are inflexible and inalienable.

In order to preserve and promote union as far as possible, all doubtful courses in morality are to be sedulously avoided. It is the duty of the strong to seek plain paths for the weak, rather than go on romantic excursions for their own diversion. They are to be on the lookout for what is unobjectionable in morals rather than trying to see what is admissible. They are commanded to be "provident\* of things noble in the estimation of all men." "Whatever† things are of good report" they are to think on and practice, not to continue dubious innovations and multiply the hazards of disagreement. Our Saviour himself taught this doctrine, and ratified it with terrible sanctions.‡

The precept which has been stated is obligatory on everybody, because it coincides with the requisitions of the moral law. To the law it is not a supplement, but an essential part.

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\* Rom. xii. 17.

† Phil. iv. 9.

‡ Mark ix. 42.

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The law enjoins the perpetual recognition of an eternal truth. It is true now, was always true, that the happiness of one man is as valuable as that of another. My neighbor's weal is worth as much as mine. Since this is unalterably true, it is proper that all moral beings should acknowledge the fact in their conduct towards each other. In equal amounts, the enjoyment of one man in the estimation of an unprejudiced mind is as desirable as the enjoyment of his neighbor. We ought therefore to consider the safety of another man as important as our own, to regard his moral integrity as sacred, and the purity of his conscience worth as much. If the moral nature of man be his highest endowment, then it is befitting that sensual and even intellectual pleasure should be held subordinate to its development and purity. If no amount of personal enjoyment can give a man a right to disregard his own conscience, why should any amount of prospective pleasure give to other men the right to expose it to violation and injury? Why should they be allowed wantonly to imperil what he is bound sacredly to preserve? If the moral state of a man's heart is of more consequence than the pleasurable excitation of his nerves, then his moral integrity is of more consequence than the like transient enjoyment of other men. If a man's reputa-

tion, though small, is too valuable to be slandered for the gratification of an unruly tongue, is not his conscience, though weak, too valuable to be seduced for the gratification of a doubtful and vitiated taste? If, for the sake of any amount of pleasure, a neighbor's orchard may not be lawlessly invaded, nor his purse taken, why should it be allowable for any one, for the sake of his pleasure, to bring a stain upon another's conscience? If the laws which guard property are sacred and inviolable, is conscience, to which all laws are addressed, to be disregarded? Which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Can the most holy place be defiled, the light of the Shekinah put out, and the temple still remain unpolluted, its glory undiminished?

The duty of waving our preference in indifferent matters, whenever its indulgence is liable to mislead a Christian in whom the power of conscience is weak, is universally binding, because such considerate regard is required by the spirit of the gospel. Christ "laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The laying down of life implies the giving up of every worldly enjoyment. How readily then ought we to relinquish a short-lived pleasure of doubtful morality to save a Christian from the danger of immense detri-

ment. Surely that pleasure, whether arising from taste, intellect, or will, costs too dearly which is to be purchased by selling a guilty conscience to one of those for whom Christ died. It would be selfish to choose our enjoyment for an hour at the peril of inflicting on our brother an injury which he can never repair. Shall we refuse to turn the course of our footsteps a little, when a small inconvenience on our part will save a brother from being pushed from a precipice? The deterioration of conscience is a misfortune, an evil, and a sin, and whoever aids in bringing it about cannot be innocent. What should we think of the religion of a man, who — all laws aside — would wantonly endanger the life of another for the sake of the insignificant sport which it affords him to shoot at a mark? Is a Christian conscience to be made the target of a brutal Gessler? Nero we know found satisfaction in letting loose hungry wild beasts to tear in pieces the bodies of Christians who were helplessly exposed in the gory arena of the Coliseum. What mind does not shudder at the thought of his brutality? The broken walls of the famous edifice are to this day a monument of his infamy, and the voiceless stones are proclaiming his everlasting shame; but of the martyrs who fell within the enclosure they speak better things, and the

thousands of springing arches stand as the honored tombstones of those who poured out their life-blood on the sand to attest the sincerity of their faith. Moral purity is more precious than life. It is the inalienable birthright of the spirit. It may, indeed, be parted with, but cannot be transferred to another. Like life, he who takes it cannot use it himself nor give it back again. Force cannot conquer it. When lost, it is lost by guile. To cheat the immortal spirit of its best inheritance by hazarding its moral purity, is immoral and cruel. Custom, in our time, may not frown on the ruthless exposure of moral integrity to the mercy of greedy passions; habits of thoughtlessness, indifference, or mirth, may keep all pitying eyes from beholding the injured sufferers; but the doings of men must at last be looked upon and estimated according to the principle which they involve.

In mediæval times it was no immorality, but an honor to inflict a wound upon the person of an antagonist at tournament; but the barbarous amusement has passed away before the light of a brighter age, and it is hoped that the spirit that could find satisfaction in similar diversions has passed away from all who bear the Christian name. Practices which present an unsafe example and entice the unstable astray are

more to be deprecated. They inflict upon the moral nature wounds more incurable than those which tilting combatants received, and are therefore as unjustifiable and remote from the spirit of the gospel as were the bloody sports of those dark times.

In morals and in religion, to be unyielding in adhesion to what is honestly believed to be the only right way, and still maintain a generous Christian toleration, is commendable; but to be overbearing in acknowledged trifles, and punctilious where nothing is imperative, is the badge of meanness. Paul magnanimously declared, "If meat make my brother stumble, I will not eat flesh while the world standeth;" but the bigoted French Jesuit, in striking contrast, said he "would not extinguish one taper though it were to convert all the Huguenots in France." Wherever the sentiment of Paul pervades men's hearts, the essential elements of Christian union already exist; but wherever the spirit of the persecuting Jesuit prevails, mutual alienation is inevitable.

The rule of conduct which has been examined is universal in its claims, because it relates to moral obligation. A moral principle, in order to be applicable to anybody, must include everybody. Law makes no exceptions, and knows no favorites. In similar circumstances, what



is right for one man is right for all,—what is wrong for one is wrong for all. A law which binds the individual binds the mass. The rule which condemns one class of immoralities must not be held back when it comes in collision with favorite practices and respectable customs. If the Corinthian Christians were bound to abstain from meat offered to idols because their eating of it imperilled the consciences of the scrupulous, so now the followers of Christ are bound to abstain from all courses of action which threaten to bring their brethren into guilt and condemnation. The rule is as broad and far-reaching as are the claims of Christ. It compasses all his followers; it extends to all doubtful practices; it includes all his subjects, binding together the great and the small, the strong and the weak, the philosophical and the superstitious, in relations of safety, harmony and law. It reaches beyond artificial and sectarian divisions, and requires all Christians to stand on the noble platform of reciprocal regard. Its claims are not mapped out by parish lines. It knows no difference between Calvinists and Arminians, between Episcopalians and Baptists. Like a bill of fundamental rights, the least departure from its true spirit may be expected at length to bring discord and endless contention. This is the Magna Charta of Chris-

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tian Union. As the universe is rendered orderly and beautiful by the steady drawing of the law of gravitation, so by the gentle constraints of this law of mutual love, all Christians are rendered fit companions for one another, and the glorious throng of the redeemed move on like the bright orbs of heaven, having in appearance the sublimity of wild confusion, in reality the higher beauty of most perfect order.

## CHAPTER IV.

### OBJECTIONS.

It is no valid objection to a principle of morality that it is not sanctioned by the general usages of Christian people. No practical difficulties in the way of securing its universal observance are to be considered of any weight.

Usage, though arbiter of forms of expression in language, cannot dictate the principles of rectitude in morals. In their estimate of what is right, men differ widely at best, as soon as we enter upon the consideration of details. In some fundamental principles there is general agreement. It is desirable that the limits of separation be made as narrow as possible. All points wherein agreement is possible should be held in concert. No room should be conceded to trivial objections and small obstacles. It is time the war of belligerent consciences was ended.

No generous-minded philanthropist will feel that the constraints imposed by the foregoing rule of morality are burdensome. It is true in the history of the human race that every other science has advanced more rapidly than ethics.

Nevertheless, it lies at the foundation of all substantial progress. Men have shown a commendable zeal to explore the universe. The stars have been watched in their silent courses. Comets have been tracked far away; the tombstones of extinct races have been dug up and deciphered; the artesian fountains of the earth have been tapped, and the minutest grains from the remotest quarters of the earth have been examined.

Says Bancroft, in his "History of the United States,"—"We praise the man who first analyzed the air, or resolved water into its elements, or drew the lightning from the clouds; even though the discoveries may have been as much the fruits of time as of genius. A moral principle has a much wider and nearer influence on human happiness; nor can any discovery of truth be of more direct benefit to society than that which establishes a perpetual religious peace, and spreads tranquillity through every community and every bosom."

Why then lingers the science of right and wrong behind? It has to do with the happiness of man, with the peace of his household, with his social affections, with his national privileges. The observance of moral law is as essential to the well-being of man on earth as the observance of physical laws. The penalties are alike sure.

Precision in ethics is as important as exactness in mathematics. Mistakes in the practical application of either bring suffering and loss in the result. The direst evils, whether private, social, or political, emerge from moral delinquency. Hereby the forces of character are misdirected, and the arm of industry palsied; society degenerates, and empires rot away. Advancement in sound morality would do more to-day to augment and diffuse physical comfort in the world than all the discoveries of science and the inventions of art are actually achieving.

The most intolerable burdens of society come in consequence of bad consciences. Because men's consciences are sprung, iron bolts have to be forged and locks contrived; because vicious appetites have power over men, excessive labor on the part of some is inevitable; because men will not govern themselves, the expenses of government must be borne; because men are eager to get without giving an equivalent, they force themselves to bear the expense of competition; because they do not like God's way, they have the vexatious labor of seeking out another in every respect inferior.

The foregoing rule of morality, therefore, does not put an undue value upon the purity of conscience. The enjoyments of which it would at first sight seem to deprive us can profitably be

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given up, at least for a limited time. The great, universal gain, accruing from so small an individual investment, transcends in value all computation. It is not a single conscience whose virtue our carefulness guards; the integrity of many may be preserved by a single deed of watchful self-denial. The power of a thousand consciences may thereby be confirmed; untold mischief may be averted; the highest and best kind of good is exalted; the spiritual sensibilities are ennobled; things temporal are subordinated to things eternal; ten thousand blessings grow upon a single deed of generous self-denial.

It may further be urged against the rule of morality which has been presented as a basis of Christian union, that its adoption would require one Christian to shape his conduct according to what others believe to be right, instead of acting according to his own convictions of duty, and would thereby subject one man's actions to the control of another man's conscience. This objection arises either from a misapprehension of the principle whose claims are set forth, or from a wrong application of it. The principle refers not to cases in which men's positive convictions clash, but to all cases in which their ideas differ in respect to what may be justified. It is applicable to all actions, the omission of which is conceded by all to be right, but the

performance of which is thought by one or more to be wrong. It does not require one Christian to follow his brother's conscience instead of his own, but to regard a brother's moral integrity of more consequence than the gratification of selfish inclination. No course of conduct which a Christian feels constrained to pursue from a sense of duty is to be abandoned because another believes it to be wrong.

Right and wrong are not caprices of the human fancy, but eternal and changeless distinctions in action. What is right is obligatory irrespective of opinions and convictions. Obligation is imperative, whether recognized or ignored. Obligation, therefore, cannot be compromised, but non-essential and ambiguous matters can readily be adjusted. For example, here are two given lines of action; one is right in the judgment of many, but the other is right in the judgment of all, and a few believe it to be the only right way. Let the many yield to the few in such a case. Their concession secures the union of all. As wisdom is better than weapons of war, so here concession is more victorious than argument. It is noble and generous to yield to inconvenience, and give up inconsiderable advantages for the sake of securing to another what is priceless in his estimation.

There are differences among professed Chris-

tians to which the rule that has been presented has no application. Antagonistic convictions are irreconcilable, and a change of sentiment on one side or the other affords the only possibility of union. Opposite beliefs cannot both be true. A believer and an infidel cannot be united. The creed of the one contradicts the theory of the other. The views of a Protestant and those of a Romanist in respect to the authority of Scripture are utterly incongruous. Toleration is all that Romanists can claim of Protestants, and persecution is all that Protestants have reason to expect of Romanists in power.

In respect to differences of this kind, the principle under discussion has nothing to do. Neither do majorities avail anything. Wealth, social position, and numbers, weigh nothing in moral questions. Even sincerity in a wrong course is not entitled to exculpation. Each individual must stand or fall at last according as the foundation on which he rests is substantial or sandy.

But for differences which are less radical, the rule which has been presented is applicable and indispensable to Christian union. A single Christian or a body of Christians are at liberty to relinquish their preferences. Much friction would hereby be removed. Denominational



barriers might be universally weakened, and at length entirely broken down. Alienations might be bridged by the law of kindness and concession. The rough edges of mutual animosity would soon grow smooth under the gentle action of this will of affection. The gratifications of appetite and pride would be held in check: even the nobler pleasures of taste and intellect would learn befitting subordination to the sovereign claims of right, and the ties of obligation which are now so often violated would be seen to be invested with inviolable sacredness. Whenever, therefore, the integrity of truth does not hinder, one man should yield his preferences to another's convictions.

He who is penurious of what belongs to himself, and prodigal of what belongs to God, is false to the sacred trust that has been committed to his guardianship.

The question arises, ought not numbers to be taken into account in deciding who is to make concession? There are some volatile natures that never look beyond general custom in shaping their conduct. It must be confessed that the gravest questions of morality are sometimes decided by popular outcry. So the Roman empire was set up by the Pretorian guards at auction; but this was making human rights very cheap.

In a country where the mind of the individual is accustomed to bow to the will of the majority, there is very great danger of overvaluing numerical superiority. In the decision of moral questions, numbers are invested with no royal prerogatives. Might does not make right. The Pope is not infallible, neither is a majority! Few will consent to the axiom of despots — “The king can do no wrong.” As kings are amenable to principles of rectitude, so are majorities. Thirty tyrants have no more right to oppress than one. A majority of thirty millions may not innocently trample on the rights of one. A single example will illustrate this principle. Liberty of conscience in this country is acknowledged as an inalienable right. Had the acknowledgment never been made, nevertheless the infliction of civil disabilities would be wrong. The voice of the million proclaiming intolerance to be just would not make it just. The most valuable rights, therefore, may exist when they are not recognized either by law or custom. The right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences belongs to millions in Europe who are constantly deprived of this privilege. Let us remember that there is more than one way in which liberty of conscience may be abridged. Legislative coercion is both renounced and denounced as wrong.

There is another form of compulsion which is more common but not more justifiable. It occurs in the disregard of the above principle of concession, when a course of action which seems forbidden to some is preferred to another course which is conceded by all to be right. When a majority, from the very force of numbers and influence, hold out the inducements of reputation, preferment, or gain, by which the scrupulous are enticed to act against their own convictions of right, then that large liberty of conscience, which Heaven has ordained and set a hedge around, is invaded and violated. An unnatural and unnecessary constraint is brought to bear down the conscience, as there is when fires and imprisonments coerce dissenters in those governments which are intolerant. In the one case there is an unjust legal enactment; in the other there is an unrighteous and oppressive custom. Both involve a depreciation of another man's conscience and a selfish invasion of his rights, for insufficient reasons. The many should yield to inconvenience rather than imperil the conscience of one. The larger the number who go in the doubtful way, the more ruinous is the force of their fashionable example. The stronger the popular tide, the surer it is that weak consciences will be carried from their moorings.

If any one will be a consistent advocate of liberty of conscience and true religious freedom, he must oppose the beginning of encroachment. All the rights of conscience in their length and breadth must be defended. Every invasion must be repelled. The guilt of recklessness or negligence cannot be estimated. Says the Saviour, "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea."

The import of this declaration seems to be that it is better for a man to die a horrible death than to lead a Christian into sin. It seems to imply that this offence is allied to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, of which there is no forgiveness. It were better for a man in view of the awards of the eternal world, to have his probation cut short, than to meet the aggravated doom of those who perpetrate this enormity. The Apostle Paul estimates that he stood upon the verge of this abysmal gulf. He thought himself the "least of all saints," because he persecuted the church of the living God. He presented the temptation of denial to those who were exposed to the severity of his inflictions. It was only because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief that he obtained forgiveness.

It would seem probable that the same offence

may be committed in another form. Seduction is as culpable as force ; treachery is as damnable as violence. Knowingly to misguide the footsteps of believers by unsound teaching is an offence of fearful magnitude. Every believer is Christ's representative. What is done to them is virtually done to Him. To offer the emoluments of gain to them for disobedience is identical in kind and in turpitude with Satan's offering all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them to Christ. "When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Again, to lead a saint into sin by holding out prospects of advantage, is to re-enact the sin which the devil committed in the original temptation of man. Saints are judicially innocent. It is God that justifies them ; who is he that condemneth ? The guilt of leading them into transgression is much like that of seducing a sinless being. At the same time let it be borne in mind that those who shut their eyes against the light are not entitled to the palliation that is granted to ignorance. It shows no love to Christ to leave his lambs to take care of themselves ; but if to save ourselves from inconvenience we carelessly expose them to danger, can we hope to be numbered among his friends ? It would seem to be an almost unpardonable offence to expose them

to temporal suffering by inattention and recklessness. The wrong is still greater if we expose them to spiritual loss. It would be an outrage to deprive them of their possessions. To rob them of their "good name" is a deeper wrong. Still worse is it to imperil their character and take away all foundation for a good name. It is an awful thing to inflict an injury which could at length be cured by subsequent kindness and care; but he who leads a Christian into sin may never hope to repair the damage done.

Moreover, the guilt is not to be measured by the evil result that is actually induced. In the common law of England, says Blackstone, "digging a ditch across a highway is punishable by indictment as a common offence to the whole kingdom and all his Majesty's subjects." So an enticement to sin, wickedly flung in the way of one weak disciple, is equivalent in magnitude to digging a pitfall in the way of the whole host of God's elect with Jesus at their head.

It is manifest that where wrong is done the guilt is not diminished by increase of numbers. Whether perpetrated by a majority or a minority; whether sanctioned by law or countenanced by unrighteous custom, the wrong is not the less. Let a million join hands to secure their

own pleasure, if it be at the known peril of one of Christ's little ones, each individual of that million is as guilty as if he alone had led the little one astray; for the guilt of wrong-doing multiplies itself as many times as there are persons consenting to its perpetration. Though the fallen little one be taken by Christ and carried up to Heaven, every person who recklessly led him astray is as guilty as if the fallen one had forever remained unpardoned; for the guilt of sin resides in its nature, not in its consequences. If millions of wicked spirits were confederated to snatch a momentary joy from evil-doing by selling our race to unknown guilt and endless hell, our woes are not the less; and the blackness of their crime remains to each and all entire.

It is, however, to be borne in mind, that this concession which is sometimes required of a majority may not always be permanent, but may sometimes be only temporary.

A little unpleasant tarrying of the cars at the station is better than a collision. Superstitious persons should not be scorned, nor stigmatized, nor ridiculed. This can never liberalize their minds, but may tempt those of them whose convictions are shallow to dissemble their views and violate their consciences. Instruction only is wanted. Where this is imparted by those

who have shown respect for their scruples it is most cordially received.

The rules of politeness forbid us to invite another to do what we know he believes to be wrong. The rule may be extended further. The spirit of Christianity carries it further. It lays aside lawful gratifications for a time, that the ignorant and illiberal may be conciliated and enlightened. Prejudice soon melts away under the genial warmth of kindness. Kindness begets candor. If, in our conduct, so far as integrity will allow, we regard the scruples of those that are narrow-minded, yielding in practice to their innocent prejudices, their minds are so conciliated by our generosity that they are unconsciously led to reciprocate the favor by going with us to the utmost limit of our theoretical conclusions whenever our reasoning is valid and substantial. Denunciations will not persuade; fines and imprisonments have not produced uniformity in belief. Harshness is not the remedy to cure illiberality. The most obdurate bigotry is that which has been hardened in the oven of persecution. If Protestants would study to avoid shocking the sensibilities of ignorant Romanists, their arguments would be more effective. The same holds true of the religious societies which receive by common consent the cardinal doctrines of the Christian



religion. Always, and everywhere, a majority should be conciliatory in their treatment of dissenters.

From these and kindred considerations, it is obvious that the *convenience* of the majority is not so important as the *integrity* of one. Right and wrong are not created by vote or acclamation. The great question of religious liberty, consistently carried out, requires the concession of the majority in some cases. The scriptural sanctions with which Christians are guarded, the intimacy of the relationship which they hold to Christ, and the temporary character of the sacrifice required to be made, when conscientiousness is founded in superstition, all illustrate the propriety of concession so far as is *lawful* even on the part of majorities.

This rule is not rigid and severe, but general and kind. Its foundation is laid in benevolence; the end which it purposes is universal good; it is twice blessed; it blesses those who practice it, and it blesses those whose virtue it guards. It develops generosity on the one hand, and secures safety on the other. On one side it lends an adornment to character; on the other side it preserves character from spoliation and injury. A limited temporary inconvenience brings the precious harvest of general, moral elevation. We honor the benefactors of our

race who have purchased universal blessings by personal sacrifices. If we may not be Washingtons, let us serve as privates.

Degeneracy of morals begins with a disregard of fraternal consideration. Inattention to the conditions of mutual moral safety, and repeated violations of the fundamental principles of right which guard the integrity of character, at length bring on the blight of social corruption and political profligacy. The public conscience lapses away gradually. By slight gradations, practices more and more questionable are introduced as the moral sense declines. The more moral integrity is impaired, the more is moral perception blinded. In this respect the deterioration of public morality is like the fall of a misguided youth. A gay young man of the city believes there is nothing more harmless than card-playing for recreation and amusement. He hesitates not to invite his scrupulous associate from the country to play a game of whist. To a warm sympathetic nature singularity is odious, and to decline a cordial invitation seems ungrateful and impolite. The conscience of his timid associate bends to the temptation. Its power is thereby weakened. At the same time a vicious taste is begotten. The first step in a downward course is taken, and the second is easy. He soon becomes accustomed

to cigars and wine ; artificial amusements, so far from seeming wrong, have become indispensable to his enjoyment. He comes at length to revel with delight in what once made him shudder with abhorrence. He rushes from the card-table to the billiard saloon, from games to gambling, from drinking to drunkenness, from pleasure to ruin. In the same way the taste of society is corrupted, and the public conscience killed out. One doubtful course leads to another. Bad precedents introduce bad customs, and bad customs make bad laws. The opposite course leads to improvement and reformation. The more discriminating become the safe leaders of those that are partially blind. The weak are delivered from superstition instead of being thrown down and entangled by it. As everything doubtful is rejected, progress is certain, and retrogression impossible.

## CHAPTER V.

### APPLICATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLE.

It has been shown that in cases of disagreement among Christians, preferences on one side ought to yield to convictions on the other. This is confirmed, 1. From the manner in which the dissension among the Corinthian Christians was adjusted. A moral precedent applicable to all similar differences, and essential to the protection of Christian purity, was unfolded and endorsed by the Holy Spirit. If the preferences of some are liable to lead others to violate their convictions, those preferences are forbidden to be indulged.

2. The same truth is inculcated in the form of a positive, scriptural precept. A disregard of it is therefore to be avoided as an immorality and a sin.

3. The line of action which is thereby required and sanctioned harmonizes with the demands of God's law. It is therefore essential to the safety and happiness of those to whom it is given.

4. Conformity to this code of morality is

essential to the spirit of love and union which the gospel breathes. Without it religion is vain, Christianity is cruel.

5. No exception is to be made in its application, because it comes in the dignity and sanctity of moral law; hence its claims are either to be all rejected or all allowed.

It is manifest that a truth thus wrought into the texture of Divine Revelation, and reaching to the foundation of Christian morality, must have a vital connection with all substantial Christian Union. The remedy which was employed by the Prince of Apostles to allay primitive dissensions and check the progress of mutual distrust, is worthy of our attentive consideration. If this apostolic precedent is cordially adopted, we may confidently hope, that many conflicting usages may be harmonized; that many recriminations may be silenced; many jealous suspicions hushed; and many inveterate contests settled. When this principle of morality is adopted as a basis of negotiation, an extensive pacification will take place among the alienated bands of the King's hosts, and the discordant shouts of contending factions will soon cease to be heard.

Standing upon the great Truth which has been discussed, let us survey as from an observatory the broad expanse of practical morality

that stretches itself on every side. The range is wide, and the prospect as diversified, as the varying convictions of men. We have in sight the fairest side of human delinquencies and human follies. Every grade of moral obliquity—from what the most conscientious consider questionable, to what the unscrupulous call *harmless*—falls under our observation. As we look, the darkest phases of many practices lie concealed from view. No exploration of questionable places is to be made; no search-warrant to hunt after sin in its lurking places is to be issued. We will look only from a single point of view, and nothing shall be condemned which is not condemned by the Truth, which has been adopted as our platform. Further investigation indeed might develop so many objectional features in current practices, that we should be led to doubt whether they had ever been countenanced by the professed followers of the crucified Nazarene.

Turn we then our eyes to the remotest outskirts to which the charity that hopeth all things can be extended. Let us look towards "Vanity Fair." There stand the houses of Mirth with their spacious apartments and gay decorations,—jubilant throngs are gathered, and pleasure seekers hurry to and fro—some delight in the theatre and dramatic representation; some pre-

fer the ball-room and the exhilarating dance — the race-course has superior attractions to others; and others still find much amusement and no harm in a game of cards. There is a gorgeous saloon! Sparkling decanters are ranged on the shelves. The air is filled with the smoke of Spanish cigars. Yonder is a spacious hall! A strange fascination entices, for the society that assembles there is secret. Pompous titles are affixed to the names of the officers of this artificial hierarchy. A glittering regalia, which has symbolic significance in each thread of gold or silver lace, bewitches the curious on days of festive parade. Some say important emoluments accrue to public men from membership.

Enough has been said to indicate the various classes of diversions which are esteemed questionable by many honest-hearted Christians. Whether they are pernicious in their inevitable tendency is not now considered. It is enough that some weak disciples, who have been drawn away and enthralled by them in former days, doubt their morality, but are nevertheless not insensible to their allurements. For example, the use of tobacco is esteemed by some to be innocent; to others the example of those who use it presents an encouragement to do what they believe to be wrong. There are none constrained from a sense of duty to its habitual

use. The same may be said of the whole class of vicious amusements to which our attention has been called. It matters not how large may be the amount of pleasure which doubtful morality promises, nor how few the number whose virtue abstinence protects; the claims of Right are as inflexible as God, and as authoritative as his voice. Though a pleasure may afford enjoyment as oft repeated as the table may be spread, or the wine-cup replenished, yet if it be purchased at the risk of a guilty conscience on the part of one for whom Christ died—though a hundred tongues revel in the exquisite gusts of delicious viands—yet if a single soul is liable thereby to be besmeared with guilt, then that pleasure, though harmless of itself, is fruit

“Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world and all our woe.”

In regard to these and similar practices, it is very important that all the witnesses of Jesus should be uniform and united in their testimony. Adherence to the Truth which has been discussed would give to the Lord's militant host an unbroken front to resist the acknowledged ungodliness of a “world lying in wickedness.”

Let us turn our eye in an opposite direction. Here we behold turrets, spires, churches, chapels, cathedrals, and tents, all filled with diverse



crowds of worshipers. Many of them have visible peculiarities in their religious observances, but all are devout, and all must be allowed to be sincere. While in outward observances and many points of underlying faith they differ, yet is there great uniformity in regard to the order of succession which they maintain in observing the ordinances of Baptism and the Eucharist. The Christian world, amid all the diversities of opinion that have prevailed, says Robert Hall, "has generally concurred in insisting upon baptism as an indispensable prerequisite to the Lord's table." It is much to be regretted that his eloquence, though successful in combining a Baptist and Pedobaptist society together at Broadmead Chapel, should in the end introduce a general disunion throughout England in the denomination of which he was a leader, in respect to a point on which the whole world of Christian believers was united before. That this division spread not to other lands, nor enter other denominations of Christians, let us look at it for a moment in the light of the principle which has been considered. It is manifest that MANY honest-hearted Christians sincerely believe that baptism is an indispensable prerequisite to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The ground of this belief need not now be discussed. It is

enough that the deliberate convictions of many disciples are decided. We need not speak of the improbability that He who is the God of order should insure confusion, by giving insufficient intimations of His pleasure.

There are NONE on the other hand who conscientiously believe that the Supper must come first. No instance of the kind is given in the New Testament. The immediate disciples of our Lord were baptized first, if they were baptized at all. That they were baptized before they taught others to be baptized is certain. The\* three thousand who were "pricked in their heart" were directed first of all to "repent and be baptized." They did not commemorate the Supper first, because they were not reckoned among the disciples till after their baptism; then it is said "they were added." The anxious state of their mind, and the pointed nature of Peter's command, alike make it certain that the first Christian ordinance which they observed was baptism. Of the inhabitants of Samaria, it is said, "when they believed Philip," "they were baptized," which implies this was the first thing they did in the character of Christians. Philip certainly did not administer the Lord's Supper to the Eunuch before he bap-

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\* Acts ii. 38; viii. 12, 38.

tized him. So considerable a transaction could not have been omitted in so minute a description as is given. Paul "arose and was baptized as soon as his sight was restored." He then "received meat," which implies that he had eaten nothing before. His blindness and loneliness also render it certain that he did not celebrate the Supper before his baptism. The Gentiles at Cesarea had never been admitted to the Supper; for till Peter inquired, "can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized?"\* they had never been recognized as Christians. The baptism of Lydia is mentioned by the sacred historian in a way which indicates that it was looked upon as the pledge of her allegiance to Christ, in view of which she had been "judged to be faithful." This act, and not the Eucharist, admitted her into the fellowship of the apostles. The jailor was baptized without delay. There is therefore no instance in apostolic practice which would give us reason to suppose that the Supper was ever observed before the baptism of those who celebrated it.

Again, it is manifest from the *nature of the two ordinances*, that none can conscientiously object that Baptism should precede the Eucha-

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\* Acts ix. 18; x. 47; xvi. 15, 33.

rist. Whatever be a man's theory, the nature of the ordinances determines which is antecedent in practice. The Supper is to be celebrated many times. Baptism is to be received but once. If, therefore, the latter is observed at all, it must in most cases come first. It would be absurd and impossible to expect to observe all the Eucharistic feasts that come in a lifetime, to know when the last one is gone, and then be baptized.

Suppose a man is converted at the age of nineteen, and begins forthwith to lead a religious life. For reasons of his own he delays baptism for a year; nevertheless he is disposed to observe the ordinance of the Supper regularly every month, and, accordingly, is found at the table as often as the months come round. At the end of the year he consents to obey the command of the Saviour and is baptized. He lives to the age of forty, and duly observes the Supper monthly, according to the general custom of Christians in New England. Now with this large margin for delay in the discharge of a duty which was performed immediately in the apostolic age, we find, in the case supposed, that the person has received the Supper as baptized in the ratio of twenty times to once as unbaptized. It is manifest that this person can have no conscientious objections to being baptized before

coming to the table the first time, because he subsequently does this very thing two hundred and forty times out of two hundred and fifty-two times in all; and furthermore has seen the brightest and most exemplary Christians of his acquaintance always doing so, with Christ and his Apostles as their pattern. On the other hand, there are those who consider it wrong to countenance an irregularity of this kind. Open communicants, who consider the matter non-essential, therefore have no right to tempt them to consent to the doubtful practice on pain of being thought illiberal, unchristian, and bigoted. Open communicants do consider the matter of baptism as non-essential to the Supper, since they allow baptism to come either before or after the Supper.

Again, some rule is indispensable to union. To a moving army, any tune to which they can march is better than discord. Whether in this case regularity exists, or disorder and irregularity prevail, even then in a majority of instances baptism must come first, if it comes at all; because one is *recurring*, the other is administered *once* for all.

Here, then, is a rule. It becomes a rule from the nature of the ordinances. Departures therefrom can only have the rank of exceptions. The Christian world, as a general thing, must ad-

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minister baptism before the Supper, unless baptism be made an uncertain contingency, and in many cases entirely omitted. There can, therefore, be no conscientious objections on the part of *any recipient* of the ordinances to consent that baptism should precede the supper. The order is not only such as commends itself to the conscience of all, but is from necessity the *general* practice of every individual. Is it worth while, then, in this world, where so much zealous Christian labor is needed, to contend for a theoretical liberty which cannot be exercised by any one but once or twice in a lifetime, and then is to be pursued without any warrant from Scripture, and in the face and eyes of the clearest examples to the contrary? It may, indeed, be agreeable to some eccentric dispositions, to lay aside the very appearance of stiffness, and disregard all regularity, for the sake of more fully assuring themselves that they are not under the constraints of uniformity, nor subject to the restrictions of law. But all such preferences belong to the subordinate class of taste, or convenience, and are not to be maintained in opposition to the rigid convictions of conscience in others. There are those, as has been said, who consider baptism prerequisite to the Eucharist. Their convictions are firm. There is little danger that they will be enticed into a practice

which they perceive to be unscriptural. There are others, however, frequently joined with them in church relations, whose views are less clear, and whose convictions are not strong enough to hold them at the peril of being thought "illiberal" and "bigoted." In liberality of sentiment and generosity of practice, no man likes to be outdone; and how often are these fair names applied to the most narrow-minded and selfish conceits. Granting, then, all that can be claimed by the most ultra advocates of free communion, that of itself it be a matter of indifference whether a man has been baptized or not before coming to the table of the Lord, it is nevertheless wrong to introduce or advocate a practice which exposes the unstable to the temptation of doing what is doubtful in their estimation. One indubitably right way is open to all. This is enough. All doubtful courses should be discountenanced and avoided.

Hence it is evident that, if every Christian will do what all are free to do, what none can conscientiously object to doing, and what all who keep both ordinances must in a majority of cases do from necessity, viz., be baptized before coming to the table of the Lord, there will be no room for difference of opinion or practice. Upon this point, then, all Christians will be agreed; what has been the general custom of

Christians in all ages will become the universal custom; the voice of debate will no more be heard; the witnesses of Christ will cease to contradict each other's testimony; and increasing confidence will take the place of distrust in many loving hearts.

The above argument may be condensed into syllogistic form, of which the major proposition is the sentiment of an inspired precept; the minor proposition is an acknowledged fact. Thus:

FORM I.

*Major Prop.*—*Claims of Conscience* in some are always paramount to *Demands of Preference* in others.

*Minor Prop.*—The *administration* of *Baptism* as *prerequisite* to the Lord's Supper is a claim of Conscience on the part of strict Communionists; its delay or omission is a demand of Preference on the part of open Communionists.

*Conclusion.*—The administration of Baptism as prerequisite to the Supper is paramount to its delay or omission.

FORM II.

*Major Prop.*—If, of two given courses of action, one of them is right in the judgment of



some but not all, while the other is exclusively right in the judgment of a few, and at the same time admissible in the judgment of all, then the course admitted to be right by all *ought to be universally adopted*.

*Minor Prop.*—The omission of Baptism before the Lord's Supper is thought to be right by many, but its preadministration is thought to be the only right way by some, and is acknowledged to be not wrong by all.

*Conclusion.*—The way admitted by all to be not wrong, viz., *the Preadministration of Baptism, ought to be universally adopted*.

It is easy now to see the direction in which Union is to be sought. But what shall be the treatment shown to those who refuse to comply with this prerequisite? No Christian, I am persuaded, will desire for himself any larger liberty than is consistent with the profoundest union of believers. It may bear the appearance of generosity to claim for another what we would not think of seeking for ourselves; but it is to be remembered that we may not take away from Christ in order to be, or seem to be liberal towards others. In respect to the ordinances of His house, we can claim nothing for others which we are not free to use ourselves. There is one law for all. To how much

consideration, then, are those entitled who will deliberately make themselves the bone of contention among those who would else be most perfectly united? Are those entitled to the confidence and fellowship of Christians who, to satisfy a capricious wish, would insult the majesty of a fundamental principle of Christian morality; "that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way?" Is the conduct of those persons to be smiled on and abetted, who wantonly bring one member of Christ's body in collision with another member, and thoughtlessly lead Christ's little ones in slippery paths, when a plain highway is open before them? This result is sure to follow, whenever a doubtful order of action is brought into competition with one which is indubitably right. We must not countenance in others what we cannot cordially practice ourselves. He that bids an evil-doer God-speed "is partaker of his evil deeds." We must not only adopt such a course ourselves as will promote permanent union, but do our utmost to lead others to seek the same result. Jesus blesses not so much those who keep the peace as the "peacemakers."

The foregoing elucidation will, it is hoped, make the way to union clear and feasible to many minds. There may be those who are con-

scientifically opposed to insisting on any prerequisite to the Lord's table. To them it is not enough to show that baptism is an unobjectionable prerequisite. Let it be understood that no prerequisite is to be insisted on with a belligerent temper, which is always unbecoming in a Christian. It is needless to say that force and arms are not advocated to keep unconverted men from being baptized, nor unbaptized men from the bread and wine. Harsh words also are misplaced when used to defend sound sentiments.

It will be admitted by all to whom these pages are addressed, that the Lord's Supper is a Christian institution. The memory of Christ's death is to be perpetuated by redeemed men. A man who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is not qualified to celebrate the Supper which commemorates the object of his death. Mohammedans, Boodhists, infidels and liars, are not to be invited to participate. Some men, then, are fitly excluded; consequently some test may rightfully be applied. If a test of some kind is necessarily employed, then that seems most suitable which is the most invariable mark of a Christian. No attentive reader of the New Testament can doubt that in the primitive ages of Christianity baptism was the visible, distinguishing badge of discipleship

This old landmark yet remains in principle among most modern sects. The forms in which the rite is now administered are indeed various; but there are few sects that do not still make it an indispensable prerequisite to full membership in their respective ecclesiastical organizations. By the general consent of nearly all sects, differing, it is true, in regard to what constitutes baptism, and who are its proper subjects, the receiving of this ordinance is considered as putting on the livery of a Christian. In this respect the common view of Christendom seems also scriptural; "for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."\* There is then nothing illiberal or invidiously exclusive in insisting upon the reception of baptism as a prerequisite to keeping the Eucharist. It is the uniform of Christ's soldiers, and the most universally recognized badge of discipleship that can be named. Since some discrimination must be observed, and the rite of baptism is generally recognized by common consent as distinctive, and since moreover the test excludes none that are entitled to come within the pale of Christian charity, and affords a basis for Catholic Union, it seems quite in accordance both with the letter and spirit of Christianity, that bap-

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\* Col. iii. 27.

tism should invariably precede the symbolic commemoration of Christ's death.

We come then to this conclusion, which is at the same time as Catholic as the gospel, and as exact as atomic law, that *baptized believers are the only persons who are scripturally qualified to celebrate the Supper*. Upon this broad platform there is room for all evangelical Christians to stand, and standing upon it, there is no danger that the most giddy-headed and faint-hearted disciple will stumble and fall. That baptized believers are the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper is a general formula to which it is hoped all to whom these pages are addressed can most cordially come. The only remaining room for difference consists in determining who are baptized believers. If common agreement can be secured in determining who are baptized believers, then in respect to a very important and much vexed question which has caused frequent heart-burnings among those that ought to love one another, there will be perfect and substantial union.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHO ARE TO BE RECOGNIZED AS BELIEVERS.

IN regard to who are believers, there is, in theory at least, remarkable unanimity among evangelical Christians. Without attempting an exhaustive analysis of what constitutes a believer, it may assist us in coming to an exact conception to bear in mind that all men are to be looked upon either as believers or unbelievers. There is no intermediate class.

There is, however, an important distinction between a fact and the evidence of a fact. In all human administration this distinction is important. In civil relations a man is held to be innocent until his guilt is proved; but in the kingdom of Christ a reverse principle holds. A man is to be esteemed an alien until his citizenship is proved. The burden of proof rests on him who claims discipleship. Men are by nature the "children of wrath," but by grace they become the children of God, and fellow-citizens of the saints.

Bearing this distinction in mind will aid us in ascertaining who are to be *recognized* as believers. They must be known "by their fruit." If there are no outward proofs of their

adoption, we are commanded not to know or recognize them. It is therefore manifestly not enough to constitute a man a Christian believer that he has a definite opinion, or a sincere belief in matters of religion, and that some of his sentiments are derived from Christ. The Mus-sulman believes in Mahomet; the Romanist in the Virgin Mary; the Mormon in Joseph Smith; and the New Jerusalemites in Emanuel Swedenborg; and all of them have more or less of Christian truth in their systems. The adherents of these and other systems cling to their superstitions with a tenacity which renders it certain that they sincerely believe what they avow.

But a Christian believes exclusively in Christ, and receives him as the sole Author and Finisher "of his faith." His creed in spiritual matters is dictated by Him from its beginning to the end. Christ is recognized as a divine teacher who has communicated through men inspired by the Holy Spirit a definite and unique system of truth, so complete that it meets all the wants of man's spiritual nature in the present state, so perfectly, that Infinite Wisdom knows of no profitable additions that could be made. While on the one hand the system of Truth which has been given by Christ is complete without addition, so on the other hand, every principle that is incorporated or taught is so essential, that it

cannot be omitted without imperfection. It has no useless appendages ; it levies no unrighteous taxes upon men ; it inculcates no superfluous duties. It aims not at the display of the Pharisee ; it countenances not the extortion of the Publican ; it is ignorant of the pliability of Pilate. Jesus, the anointed of God, never dealt moral redundancies to lost men, or bewildering ambiguities to honest-hearted seekers after Truth. His system is complete, without superfluity or excrescence. A defect would indicate a corresponding defect in its Author, just as ugly proportions in an edifice indicate incompetence in the architect. If there be any redundancy in the doctrines or precepts of Christ, then there is weakness in his character ; if there be any defect in the amplitude of Revelation, then there is a corresponding lack of benevolence, wisdom or power in its Author.

That man, therefore, cannot be accounted a believer in the Divine Christ who denies the validity of what Christ taught, or who claims the right to set aside particular parts of his teaching for reasons of his own.

A believer in Christ receives this principle as axiomatic — that *every word which Jesus spoke is binding and unalterably true*, whether it appears to men reasonable or unreasonable, comprehensible or incomprehensible, essential



or non-essential. No man can claim without presumption that he holds the whole truth and nothing but the truth as it is in Jesus; nevertheless every soul in which the Holy Spirit has wrought with Almighty and regenerating power has received a holy predilection for Truth, and a most cordial consent of the will to perceive and lay hold of it in its length and breadth. There is no such affinity for the truth of God without regeneration. In regeneration the soul is partially illumined with the Truth, and receives such a docility of temper that it ever after stands in a listening attitude towards Christ, eager to hear each word He speaks, and catch every motion of His eye. At the same time the principle of hearty obedience to the will of Christ is begotten in the soul. Christ is seen and loved in his various offices as Teacher, Mediator, Saviour and King.

The outward life takes shape according to the inward convictions, and thus the word of God becomes the rule of practice as well as the standard of faith. The deliberate rejection of any doctrine, or precept, or the persistent violation of any duty enjoined by Christ, takes away from any one the right of claiming to be acknowledged as a believer. Christ himself has announced the true and immutable test of discipleship. "Ye are my friends if ye do what-

soever I command you." A settled principle of thorough-going obedience is indispensable. If this requisition can be diminished a fraction, upon any consideration, with equal right it can be entirely set aside. It is in fact entirely set aside when another, differing a jot from it, is put in its place. Jesus gives his own definitions of a disciple. Will any wish, or dare to make it different, to

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,  
Rejudge his justice, be the God of God!"

After his resurrection, our Lord gave to his Apostles their commission. In the most solemn manner He directed them to teach those who became disciples "*to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" It is manifest that no one could be acknowledged by the Apostles as a believer who was intractable and steadfastly refused to "observe" what they taught. From what they taught and practiced, we must learn the import of the commission which they received. Their practice is a reliable commentary on the exact meaning of Christ's words. They enjoyed three years of instruction under the personal ministry of Jesus, which was ample time to lay the foundation of their qualifications for their subsequent work. The Holy Spirit was promised by Him to recall to their minds and interpret what He had told

them: "He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John xiv. 26.) His assistance was also promised to enable them to avoid all mistakes in applying the instruction which they received. "Howbeit, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, he will *guide* you unto all truth." Besides all this, Paul and all the Apostles wrought miracles in proof that they taught the will of Christ. This Divine Signet is affixed to their teaching and preceptive acts. The institutions which they founded, therefore, were authorized and ordained by Christ.

If they organized churches, then churches were founded by Christ. That there were bodies of baptized believers in separate localities called churches, which were organized and confirmed by apostolic authority, is evident to every reader of the New Testament. We read of "the church of God which is at Corinth,"—of "the churches of Galatia,"—"churches of Judea,"—and "churches of the Gentiles." These phrases show that in apostolic times there were many separate organizations called churches. To the upbuilding of churches Paul devoted his life. There came on him "daily the care of all the churches." To them as collective bodies, and not to the individuals of which they were composed, he wrote Epistles. These organizations

are called "churches of God"\* and "churches of Christ."† The Acts of the Apostles is a history of primitive church-organization. At Jerusalem, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Lord "added to the church daily the saved." Paul and Barnabas, as missionaries, were "recommended to the grace of God" by the church at Antioch; they founded several churches, and "ordained them elders in every church;" and when they returned, "they gathered the church together, and rehearsed all that God had done." They went out from a church,—their work was organizing and confirming churches,—they returned and reported to a church "that God had done" what had been done.

To these local organizations called churches, great deference is shown in the New Testament. Inspired men greeted them with the most affectionate salutations; they showed the utmost care for their growth and prosperity; they insisted on men of special qualifications to take the oversight of churches; they affixed to churches the names of the Deity as belonging peculiarly to Him; they pronounced benedictions from the Holy Spirit upon them.

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\* 1 Cor. xi. 16; i. 2.    1 Thess. ii. 14.    2 Thess. i. 4.

† Rom. xvi. 16.

Almost the whole of the New Testament treats of precepts and doctrines which were designed to subserve the formation, conduct, growth and multiplication of churches.

The origin of churches is to be found in the gospels, coming from Him who is the Head of every Christian church; the Acts of the Apostles contains the history of their establishment; the Epistles unfold the doctrines on which they are to be instructed, confirmed and consolidated.

The charter for church organization came down from Heaven. No man, therefore, is entitled to be considered a believer in Christ who ignores the peculiar institution which Christ has set up. Whoever truly and intelligently believes in Christ will believe in his accredited apostles, and appointed institutions. If there be such a local organization in existence as the Apostles formed in the respective places where they labored, he must be ready to connect himself with it, and labor for its prosperity; if there be not one now upon earth after the apostolic pattern, he must be ready to form one. A willingness to be a member of a church of Christ is to be expected of all who profess belief in Him. The duty is so plainly taught in the Scriptures, that a refusal to enter church relations must proceed from one of two sources; either persons err, not knowing the Scriptures,

or they reject the counsel of God. The former difficulty is to be removed by expounding unto them the way of God more perfectly; the latter is setting aside the authority of Christ, and is to be treated as infidelity. The person may be regenerate, but in the absence of befitting evidence the presumption is to the contrary. The disposition to contravene the word of Christ is Satanic, and is to be discountenanced by every true disciple as decidedly as the infidelity of Peter was by the Lord himself, when he turned and said to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan," because he had contradicted his assurances.

But is church membership essential to salvation? It certainly is not essential to the salvation of those who properly compose it, because, being regenerated, their salvation is sure before they are qualified to come into this relationship. Nevertheless, membership is essential to the existence of churches; and churches are essential to the existence of the Christianity of Christ, because they constitute one of its prominent features; and the Christianity of Christ is essential to the salvation of the world, because it is the system ordained by God to accomplish this stupendous result. The Christian church is a grand organization, not designed with special reference to the salvation of an individual, but ordained by God as the machinery by which

the world is to be revolutionized and renovated. It is the lever of God for overturning the works of the devil; it is God's speaking-trumpet through which he calls a lost world to repentance; it is the vestibule of God's abode where his children take exercise and discipline before they enter His immediate presence. All private and individual interests, therefore, are meagre in comparison with the great ends to be compassed through the instrumentality of the Church.

If, as has been shown, the Church is a divinely appointed organization, then church-membership is ordinarily to be expected and demanded of those who claim to be recognized as Christian believers. At the same time it is manifest that a man may go up to glory, as the thief from the cross, without ever having shown any respect to either of the ordinances which Christ instituted, and without ever having given any proof of love to the church, which He ordained as his tabernacle on earth.

It is, however, not to be inferred that the authority of Christ is nullified, because his mercy is signal, or that the church and its ordinances are superfluous, because a sinner may be saved without ever having recognized their sphere, or paid to them the honor to which they are entitled. A shipwrecked mariner has escaped

from the engulfing waves without the aid of a boat; it does not follow that ships are not needed to cross the Atlantic. A lawyer, who never saw the inside of a school-room, stands on the top of professional success;—schools, colleges, and seminaries, are not, therefore, to be despised as useless appendages of society; because it is, after all, through the light which they diffuse, that the uneducated are educated. In like manner churches are not the less to be esteemed and guarded as the peculiar inheritance of Christ, because one's individual salvation does not depend upon being a member. Let it be borne in mind that the salvation of countless multitudes is brought about through the instrumentality of "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

It is to be expected accordingly, that every right-minded disciple will recognize the Church as a hallowed institution whose corner-stone was laid by Christ himself. Hence he must be willing to come within the restraints of the sacred inclosure and perform the duties which the relation involves.

It is not pretended that a man is not a believer till he is received into church fellowship. His reception into the church is to be looked upon as a public *acknowledgment* of a previously existing fact. His profession of faith in Christ



is hereby accredited as a reality in the judgment of the body. So every society is compelled from necessity to judge of the qualifications of the candidates which are proposed for its membership. If the credentials are satisfactory, the candidate becomes a member, and as such is entitled to a share in the community of labors, privileges, and responsibilities. Without the common consent he is entitled to no participation in aught that belongs to the fraternity, and like Paul essaying to join himself to the disciples, he must wait till they are ready to own him as a disciple.

There is inevitable imperfection in every arrangement which is administered by human hands. Under apostolic administration, Ananias and Sapphira were admitted on counterfeit evidence; and Paul, on the other hand, was for a time excluded, because the existing evidence was not satisfactory. The administration of either of the ordinances to a candidate is an official recognition of his discipleship. It is an open expression of fellowship made in behalf of every individual composing the body of Christian believers. To them the system of faith has been delivered in charge, and for its integrity they are to "contend earnestly." The ordinances are in their keeping. They belong to no one individual, but equally to all. They

are not from their nature private, but public institutions. Their very existence presupposes a collection of individuals. It takes more than one person properly to observe either of them. A man cannot baptize himself, nor eat the Lord's Supper alone. Whoever administers either, acts officially in the name of Christ and of all the saints. A single church or a single man may administer either ordinance, but in so doing, his action, though seemingly independent, is nevertheless virtually representative, since what is communicated belongs to Christ, and is vested equally in all believers. The qualifications of the candidate must be such as to merit universal approbation, yet the right to judge seems vested in each individual and in each church. For correct decisions they are accountable to the Master. The recognition is universal. The nature of the recognition determines the kind of evidence to be presented by the candidate. It should not be of such a kind as may suffice for some individuals, but such as will insure the confidence and fellowship of the whole fraternity of recognized believers.

A public profession of Faith in Christ is indispensable in order for those or any part of those whose interests are involved, to act intelligently towards a candidate who desires to be initiated into the privileges of the Christian

household. It is manifestly absurd to offer either of the ordinances, in which the fellowship of the whole body of believers is signified, without the mutual consent of those who are the natural and recognized guardians of the Christian ordinances. The offering of one of the ordinances to a candidate implies his fitness for both. But we have seen in a preceding chapter, that there is a natural order which all are bound, by the principles which Christ has laid down, to observe. If any discard his commandments, they are not to be *recognized* as his disciples, and therefore *neither* of the ordinances *are* to be offered them. They may indeed be disciples, but if they fail to present the stipulated official credentials, the regular, official recognition, cannot be given.

The view which has been taken of the sanctity and authority which environs the duty of church membership is not Popish, Prelatic, nor extravagant. It receives a practical endorsement from the general usages of all existing sects. Upon the Scriptural characteristics of a true church there are differences of opinion which it does not fall within our present scope to consider. But the existence and support of churches demonstrates the esteem in which they are held. If they were not believed to be ordained of God they would not be at all. The

present practice of Christendom therefore acknowledges what the New Testament enjoins upon all Christians, viz., the duty of planting and training churches, and, consequently, the duty of individual church-membership.

We conclude, therefore, that believers are those who heartily accept Christ as their Saviour, and receive his word as complete and exclusive authority in religion. Hence those, and those only, are to be *recognized* as believers who *profess* faith in Christ and bring forth the fruits of faith. A profession of faith may be *private* or *public*, and the kind of profession determines the kind of recognition to which it is entitled. A private recognition is one which proceeds from individuals only: a public recognition is one which proceeds from a Christian church. The former was given to Paul by Barnabas when he introduced him to the apostles; the latter was for a time withheld by the church, because they were all afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple. Acts ix. 26-28. The differences which separate evangelical societies affect not individual piety but organic relation. Adjust this difference and there will be perfect union. If, now, agreement can be reached in regard to who are baptized, these societies may come into mutual fellowship, and honestly give and receive tokens of organic union.

## CHAPTER VII.

### UNION IN RESPECT TO WHO ARE BAPTIZED.

THE question, Who are Baptized, yet remains to be considered. The thorough discussion of this topic would lead us on to controverted ground. Union is rarely to be gained by argument. The best hope rests in concession. But that is unworthy the name of Union which breaks a single conscience in fastening the band. If Christians are agreed in regard to this much vexed question, it must be in one of two ways. They must either conclude that baptism is not essential to the Christian religion, and by common consent omit it altogether, or come to some mutual understanding in regard to what is essential to the rite.

There are very few, if *any*, that can conscientiously consent to the total abolishment of baptism. It is cherished as a sacred rite both by Romanists and Protestants. Its name has been revered through all the night of the dark ages. Whether worshiping in cathedrals, churches, chapels, or tents, all without exception who call themselves after the name of

Christ, recognize and venerate something which they call baptism, as a cherished heir-loom that has come down to them from the Divine founder of Christianity. With but a single exception (as I am aware) it has been regarded by Christian sects of all ages and countries, of all sizes and degrees of respectability, as an outward ceremony to be observed either in person or by proxy, by every individual of the Christian family. To uproot these deep-grown convictions is as impossible as it is undesirable.

Moreover, baptism is as prominent in the New Testament as it is conspicuous in the practice of the Christian world. Christ himself *honored the rite* by his example, and thus fulfilled "all righteousness," of which it is a part. He himself administered it to his disciples, not indeed by his own hands, but by his own authority. He gave it *special mention* in the most formal commission he ever issued. He announced the time and place of meeting beforehand. At that warned meeting the disciples assembled, "on a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had appointed them," to receive his behests. Upon that hallowed mountain the risen Jesus stood face to face with his disciples. That scene was awful, when Jehovah descended in fire upon Sinai, amid the smoke and the voice of the trumpet, and the quaking of the moun-

tain ; but surely not more memorable and glorious than this. Then and there peals of thunder echoed loud and long. Here silence reigns ; such as once there was in heaven for the space of half an hour ; so deep and solemn that nought is heard but the heart's own measured beating, till Jesus in Godlike majesty lifted up his voice and said, " There has been given to me all authority in Heaven and upon Earth. Go ye therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you."

Mark the special mention of baptism. All other duties are grouped together in a general expression ; baptism is singled out and made prominent by being called by name. Amid the thousands of other Christian duties it is placed first, and made a speciality by receiving specific mention. In the great commission, baptism appears like the full-orbed, clear moon in the summit of the sky, conspicuous, beautiful, and majestic, while other duties all comprehended in a general designation appear like stars scattered down along thence to the horizon ; many of them brighter than their mistress, and many larger in reality, though not in vision. The commission in all its parts derives weight from

the solemn assurance with which it is introduced. He who gave it is clothed with all the prerogatives and authority of the Eternal God. The duty of baptism is furthermore entwined with all that is mysterious and sacred in the name of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. None, therefore, will feel free to abrogate the ordinance as non-essential, so long as the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ remains unrepealed.

The *frequent mention of the rite* in the Acts of the Apostles teaches us that the words of the Great Commission were regarded and obeyed by the primitive disciples. When record is made that men "believed" it does not fall beneath the dignity of the inspired narrative to add also that "they who gladly received the word were baptized." Every Christian, therefore, would feel rebuked to lay aside an ordinance which was prominent in the Apostolic age.

In the Epistles there are *figurative allusions* to the rite which make it a *symbolic representation of fundamental truths*. We are taught that the Death and Resurrection of our Lord is thereby affirmed in typical language; that the doctrine of Spiritual Regeneration is thereby symbolized; and the future Resurrection of believers foreshadowed. Rom. vi. 3; Col. ii. 12;



To utterly lay aside the ordinance of baptism, therefore, is to lay aside the most impressive symbols by which the Gospel is preached to men. The ordinances are God's diagrams to illustrate fundamental truths. The more we reflect, the more preposterous the idea of abolishing baptism appears. We might as well think of abolishing Christianity. It will forever be an impossibility. Union, therefore, in that line, can never be reached.

Nevertheless, if baptism could be abolished, and union thereby secured, still *the principle involved in such a concession* ought to be well considered before its adoption. A reason which is cogent in this instance must be cogent in similar instances. It is true baptism, as a rite, exists only in form. If on this account it may be abrogated, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper must also be abandoned for similar reasons. Take away the form from the ordinances, and you take away all. Visible churches, too, must on the same principle cease to be. Whatever is external must sooner or later be abandoned. It is manifest that union cannot be reached in this way till Atheism is reached. For what is external in religion is the counterpart of what is internal. One cannot exist without the other. Destroy one and the other will die. The assumption that men in any particular are wiser

than the Lord Jesus Christ finds its logical conclusion in the rejection of the system which he founded.

“Whatever link you strike,

Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.”

As a practical question, union cannot be secured by the entire abandonment of the rite of baptism, because this would *require the renunciation of a belief almost universal*; it would require a nullification of the plainest precepts of the New Testament,—a setting aside of the preceptive example of Christ,—the abrogation of the Great Commission,—the disregard of the Apostolic practice,—the taking away from the Gospel the mute symbols through which it speaks,—and the adoption of a principle which would lead to the total subversion of Christianity. Some kind of a rite then is indispensable; the conscience of Christendom demands it; Christianity is not complete without it. Here again our conclusion is concentric with the orbit of general belief.

The point which has just been considered might have been more summarily dismissed had it not been for a mischievous fallacy which has crept into many minds through the unguarded use of the word “essential.” To a company of raw recruits strict military regimen may seem irksome, and in no way essential to

the preservation of their lives. In some cases it certainly is not essential to their individual welfare. But there are higher ends than individual convenience. The momentous issue of battles, of campaigns, and of wars, the lives and fortunes of armies and of the fate of nations depend upon the discipline of individuals. It cannot be affirmed that baptism is essential to the individual salvation of any one who is qualified to receive it, but it is essential to the honor of the founder of Christianity ; it is essential to the entireness of the system which He ordained ; it is essential to the purity of Christian churches ; it is essential to the maintenance of sound principles of interpretation ; it is essential to the conscientious integrity of many believers ; it is essential to their cordial union and oneness, upon which the salvation of the world depends. John xvii. 21.

These stupendous ends far outweigh all private interests, and yet in the unsearchable wisdom of God they are never hostile to individual weal, but joined firmly with it by friendly ties.

Since the baptismal rite cannot be entirely laid aside, a mutual agreement in what is essential to render it valid is the only means by which cordial union in this respect can ever be secured, or even hoped for. It seems very desirable that unanimity of sentiment should exist

on this point. The disagreement which has hitherto prevailed is especially to be regretted, because it relates to what is visible and palpable. On unbelievers the diversity of forms in which the ordinance is administered makes a deep impression; and the varying usages in their eyes seem to be conspicuous land-marks which show the immense distances separating professed believers in Christ. There can be no doubt that this difference is a fruitful cause of infidelity.

Since baptism cannot be abandoned altogether, without inaugurating principles whose working would overturn Christianity itself, let us see if common agreement cannot be secured in regard to what is essential to the rite. We would not intimate that simple agreement is all that is necessary to constitute any ceremony baptism, but indulge the hope that what can be approved by common consent includes all that the Scriptures require.

It is generally agreed by all sects that baptism is a ceremony which *requires an administrator*. This universal opinion is scriptural; for the appointment of persons to administer the ceremony implies not only that its due performance is very important, but that one cannot do it for himself. John the Baptist says that he was "sent to baptize." Christ directed his dis-

ciples to baptize. The Lord himself, designing to furnish a *pattern* to his followers, received baptism of another. All the examples in the Scriptures indicate a ceremony to be performed by an administrator.

The *repetition* of the *formula*, when the rite is received by each individual, is a custom which, so far as I am aware, universally prevails. It is an oath of allegiance, in which the candidate renounces himself, the world and the devil, and solemnly consecrates himself forever to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Its administration is the sublimest ceremony ever performed by man. The inauguration of human government, the coronation of kings, the marriage of princes, cannot approximate to the solemnization of the union between an immortal soul and the triune God. In retaining the formula which lends dignity to the ceremony and expresses its design, there is complete unanimity.

It is furthermore universally agreed *that water is to be used* in performing the rite. In this the churches of all sects unite, and the usages of all ages bear witness of their agreement. So in the Scriptural examples of baptism, the water is conspicuous as essential to the rite. Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan; John resorted to "Enon, near to Salim, because there was much water there;" the Eunuch exclaimed,

“See, here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” and Peter inquired, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?” In the three concomitants of baptism which have been named, there is the profoundest harmony of sentiment and the most complete uniformity of practice.

The line of agreement does not stop here. The practice of bringing the *person* of the *candidate* and the *water* in *contact* is also universal. Without this, all agree that there is no baptism. It is not enough for the eye to behold the water, nor for the person to bend towards it by way of recognition ; the person of the candidate and the water must be made to touch each other. Thus much at least is claimed by all to be indispensable. In regard to the way in which the water is to be applied there is not complete agreement. It is certain that some rite is most solemnly enjoined ; its utter rejection would be discountenanced by all. The neglect of the ordinance as of an acknowledged duty on the part of an individual must be looked upon as a trespass ; but the abrogation of the ordinance insisted on as a right is nothing less than treason ; for to attempt it aims at the authority of the government by which the ordinance was instituted. But as yet we have no rite whatever. If bringing the person of the candidate

and the water in contact were all that is essential to the rite, we might have as many forms as there are ways in which this could be done. The wetting of the eyes would be one form; the dipping of the foot in water would be another; the touching of the lips with water would be a third; the dipping of the finger in water would be a fourth. Thus the forms of the rite would be infinite in number. In other words, we should have as many ceremonies as the taste and ingenuity of men saw fit to invent. We therefore look for something more specific.

It is no assumption to presume that Heaven's directions—since Heaven has condescended to direct—are exact enough to secure uniformity, if they were understood and adopted. God is not responsible for the differences that exist, nor for greater ones that might exist under the instructions which He has given. Order is Heaven's first law. Not a thousand ceremonies, but one single ceremony has been instituted. To ascertain the way in which it is to be performed is as important as its observance; for we cannot perform an act which we know not how to perform. Fortunately only three different ceremonies have actually come into use. Whether all of them are alike valid we will not now stop to inquire. If either one of them contains all that is essential to baptism,

it is manifest that it would contribute immensely to Christian Union to lay aside the other two. A multiplicity of forms only leads to perplexity and disagreement. If either one meets the conscientious convictions of Christendom, there is sufficient presumption in its favor to warrant its exclusive adoption.

Between sprinkling and pouring there is little room for choice, since those sects which reject either one of them reject both alike as unscriptural. Immersion is thought by some to be burdensome and unnecessary, but is nevertheless conceded by all Protestant sects to be sufficient and valid. It contains everything that is essential to the rite in the judgment of the most scrupulous and exacting, and at the same time includes nothing which invalidates its sufficiency in the judgment of those who would prefer one of the other ceremonies. There is a general agreement that it is sufficient. More than this can be urged in its favor. Its validity is publicly acknowledged so generally among Protestant sects that it will be no exaggeration to say that it is universally recognized as genuine baptism.

This concession appears in two forms: in the *writings of learned men* and in the *practice of Christian Societies*. From the definitions that are given of the word used in the New Testa-



ment to describe the rite, it is obvious that immersion is admissible, if not imperative. The testimony of those who prefer the ceremony of sprinkling, as most of those which are inserted below do, is entitled to especial weight. The definitions of twenty-seven Greek lexicographers is inserted to show that immersion, to say the least, satisfies the demands of the word by which the rite of baptism is enjoined in the New Testament.\*

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\* THE TESTIMONY OF STANDARD LEXICONS.

1. *Baptizein*—to baptize, “signifies only to immerse; not to wash except by consequence.”—*Alstedius*.

2. “*Baptism* in strictness of speech is that kind of ablution or washing which consists in dipping; and when applied to the Christian institution, so called, it was received by the primitive Christians in no other sense than that of dipping, as the learned Grotius and Casaubon each observe.”—*Bailey*.

3. *Baptizo*, “To dip, immerse, plunge in water; to bathe oneself; to be immersed in suffering or affliction.”—*Bass*.

4. *Baptizo*, “Properly, to dip often, to wash often. This is the meaning of the word; for in *Baptizo* is contained the idea of a complete immersion under water; at least so is *Baptism* in the New Testament.”—*Bretschneider*.

5. *Baptizo*, “To immerse repeatedly into a liquid; to submerge; to soak thoroughly; to saturate.”—*Donnegan*.

6. *Baptizo*, “To immerse, immerge, submerge, sink;

Most of the leading sects in the United States do occasionally administer baptism by immersion. All of them are accustomed to admit persons who have been baptized thus as members

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in N. T. to wash, perform ablution, cleanse; to immerse, baptize, administer the rite of baptism."—*Greenfield*.

7. *Baptizo*, "To dip, immerse, immerge, plunge; to wash, cleanse, purify."—*Groves*.

8. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, to plunge, immerse, overwhelm in water; to purify, to wash."—*Hedericus*.

9. *Baptizo*, "To plunge, plunge in water, dip, baptize, bury, overwhelm."—*Jones*.

10. *Baptizo*, "Baptize, merge, bathe."—*Leusden*.

11. *Baptizo*, "To dip repeatedly, dip under. Mid. to bathe, hence to steep, wet; pour upon, drench. *Note*.—The examples of this signification given, are worthy of notice, viz., 'over head and ears in debt'—'a boy overwhelmed with questions;' to dip a vessel, draw water, to baptize, N. T."—*Liddell and Scott*.

12. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, to immerse, to wash."—*Passow*.

13. *Baptizo*, "To dip, immerse or plunge in water; to baptize, to immerse in or wash with water."—*Parkhurst*.

14. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, immerse, wash."—*Robertson*.

15. *Baptizo*, "To dip in, to sink, to immerse, to dip in a vessel, to draw water. In N. T., 1, to wash, to lave, to cleanse by washing, in Mid. to wash oneself, perform ablution; 2, to baptize, to administer the rite of baptism."—*Robinson*.

16. *Baptizo*, "To plunge or immerse; also to dye, as

of their churches in full fellowship without re-administering the ordinance. Immersed persons can be found in almost every Pedobaptist Society in New England, and it is no uncom-

we immerse things in water for the sake of dyeing or cleansing them; to dip, submerge, overwhelm in water; to cleanse, to wash."—*Scapula*.

17. *Baptizo*, 1, "Properly, to immerse, and dip in, to plunge into water; then because a thing is customarily immersed and dipped into water, that it may be washed; hence, 2, it signifies to cleanse, to wash, to purify with water."—*Schleusner*.

18. *Baptizo*, "To plunge, immerse; to cleanse, to wash."—*Schættgenius*.

19. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, plunge, wash, bathe."—*Schrevelius*.

20. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, to plunge, to overwhelm, to dip into; to wash by plunging; sometimes sprinkle, besprinkle, to pour upon; to purify and consecrate to God by plunging."—*Schwarzzius*.

21. *Baptizo*, "To plunge or immerse; to plunge under, or overwhelm in water; to cleanse, to wash."—*Stephanus*.

22. *Baptizo*, "Generally, and by the force of the word, it has the sense of dipping and immersion. *Specially*, it is properly to immerse or dip into water. Metaphorically, by metalepsis, it is to wash, to cleanse; because it is customary to dip and immerse anything into water, that it may be washed or cleansed."—*Stokius*.

23. *Baptizo*, "Immerse, wash."—*J. C. Suicer*.

24. *Baptizo*, "To plunge, immerse, dip, dip in, to make wet, to wash, to cleanse, to purify."—*Suidas*.

mon thing in England for dissenting Baptists to immerse members of the Established Church. The Lord's Supper is everywhere cordially administered to persons who have been immersed, while at the same time it is co-extensively claimed that baptism is a prerequisite to the Supper. These are acknowledgments, not that all sects prefer immersion, but that all sects admit that immersion is valid Christian baptism. It satisfies the convictions of all, though many have decided preferences in favor of one of the other ceremonies which are in use.

The habitual usage of the various sects in fellowshiping immersed persons without ad-

25. *Baptizo*, "To baptize, to dip into water, or to plunge one into the water."—*Wilson*.

26. *Baptizo*, "Immerse."—*Walderus*.

27. *Baptizo*, "To dip all over, wash, baptize."—*Young*.

*Remark*.—Only one of the above twenty-seven give the definition "to pour upon," and this is not to be found in the late editions. This definition has been abandoned as untenable. Only one inserts the definition "to sprinkle," and adduces no instance in support of such usage. It therefore goes for nothing. We will place opposite it the following concession from Prof. Robinson, Professor of Biblical Literature in the Union Theological Seminary, which is to be found in a note under *Baptizo*.

"In Greek writers as above exhibited, from Plato onwards, *Baptizo* is EVERYWHERE to SINK, to IMMERSE, to OVERWHELM, either wholly or partially." *Lex.*, p. 118.

ministering any other ceremony, is a tacit admission on the part of all who compose them that immersion is valid baptism, because this usage has called forth no remonstrance. The acknowledgment has been made publicly, and repeatedly, and without dissent. The practice of immersion therefore could be universally adopted without invading the conscientious convictions of any. All admit its validity. It offends the conscience of none ; it is universally conceded to be right, if not essential.

Now from the principle of Christian Union which has been unfolded and established in the preceding pages, we must conclude that any departure from the practice of immersion is inexcusable and wrong. If the form of itself is non-essential in the judgment of some, they are bound to adopt that which is imperative in the judgment of others, because by different usages some Christians, whose convictions are not deep and positive, are subjected to the danger of sanctioning a doubtful course instead of one which they know to be right. It is not enough that some are satisfied with sprinkling and pouring ; it is not enough to warrant their adoption at all, even if on grounds of taste and convenience they were preferable ; because the claims of conscience on the one side are paramount to the pleadings of inclination on the

other. Those who practice sprinkling choose it on the ground of taste and convenience; but those who practice immersion are compelled to do so by the claims of conscience. All preferences which arise from taste or inclination in opposition to the convictions of others are to be abandoned, because they expose unstable Christians to the danger of violating their convictions.

There are many Christians who doubt the sufficiency of sprinkling for baptism, and not a few in Pedobaptist societies; but emboldened by the example of those whom they love and respect, drawn by family ties, and persuaded by the ardor of friendship and the love of society, they have waived their convictions, and consented to receive sprinkling instead of immersion. This is a sufficient reason why every other ceremony except immersion as baptism, should be laid aside from general use. He that doubts its validity, sins if he submits. The practice of sprinkling and pouring for baptism, as has been shown above, is not exclusively enforced by the consciences of any, because all tacitly admit immersion to be sufficient and valid. Immersion is exclusively enforced by the consciences of many, because they do not believe either sprinkling or pouring to be baptism, but surreptitious ceremonies. The prac-

tice of immersion, therefore, could be adopted by all Protestant sects without violating the dictates of conscience on the part of any; but neither of the other ceremonies could be adopted without a radical change of sentiments on the part of all those who now reject them. Immersion contains what is essential to the rite of baptism. Its universal adoption would contribute in the highest degree to promote Christian Union.

But not only does the practice of sprinkling bring a snare upon the consciences of many within the pale of Pedobaptist churches; there are unstable members in other societies who are hampered and tempted to waive their convictions to escape the imputation of bigotry and close communion. Among those that are firmly grounded in the truth there is no fear of a charge that cannot be sustained. They perceive that if it did not look like unchristian retort and savor of unkindness, it could be shown that the odium of a divided communion clings to those who refuse to make a concession that lies within the scope of their present convictions. The practice of immersion could be universally adopted without violating the positive convictions of any, but this is not true of sprinkling or pouring. There are some who consider the latter to be unwarranted human inventions.

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To countenance these ceremonies as baptism seems to them to involve a fundamental subversion of correct principles of interpretation, or the overthrow of the Protestant doctrine that the word of God is the only and all-sufficient rule of faith. These are grave considerations. The conscientious scruples of any who profess to be Christians are entitled to respect even when they are based in groundless superstition. They should not be ridiculed, but enlightened. A practical concession is due to them from those who consider themselves wiser. This might be claimed, if the case was only such as led them to halt and hesitate between two opinions. But still more is concession towards them required when the convictions of many are not only decided, but supported by arguments involving the most weighty considerations, while those who differ from them are hampered by no positive convictions, and only insist that the form of the rite is in their judgment non-essential.

If it be in fact with them a matter of indifference, so that they are free to adopt either course, then all the pernicious consequences of Disunion are chargeable on them; since they are free to go with those who are constrained by stern convictions, while on the other side there is no margin for choice. A matter of mere taste, or convenience, or habit, on one



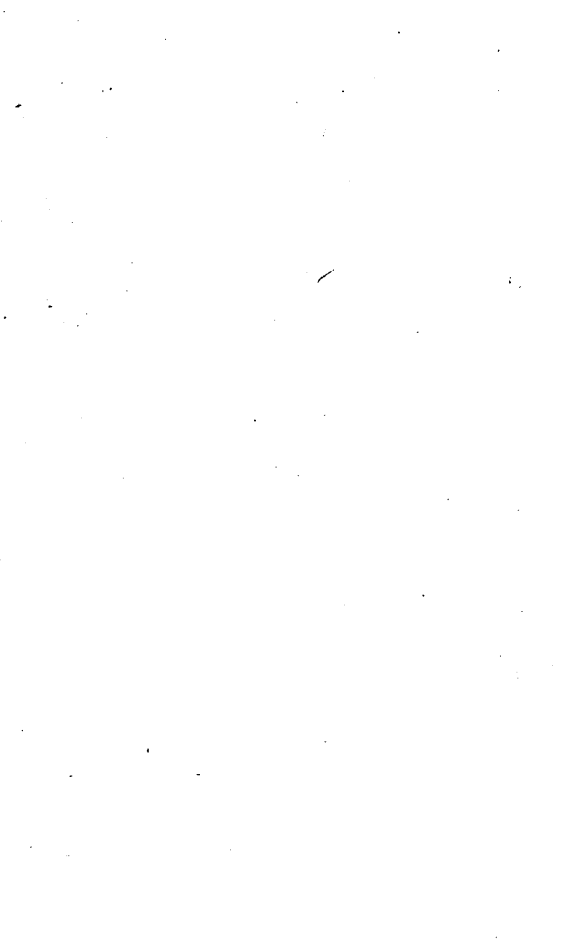
side, ought always to be made subordinate to conscience and duty on the other. To the upright, conscientious scruples are stronger and more impassable than bars of iron. Those who consider them in bondage ought to consider themselves as "bound with them," that they may set them at liberty. Whatever body of Christians refuse to abandon a course of action in the administration of the ordinances to which their inclination leads, but to which their consciences do not exclusively compel them, and thereby exclude conscientious Christians from the Lord's table, are chargeable with what is odious in close communion. Now all ecclesiastical societies that persist in the practice of sprinkling for baptism refuse to abandon a course to which their inclination leads, but to which their consciences do not exclusively compel them, and thereby exclude all conscientious Christians who believe that immersion is a prerequisite to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It follows that all such organizations are chargeable with the odium that belongs to close communion. Every member is a party aiding and abetting this uncharitable and unnecessary exclusion. The wrong is double; it endangers the moral integrity of those that are unstable in their convictions, and shuts out all who are hindered by deep convictions from counten-

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ancing what they consider to be a perversion of the gospel. This separation should not be allowed to exist. The way which is doubtful in the estimation of some should be renounced by all in favor of the one which is acknowledged by common consent to be right. If nothing else, this state of things not only renders one way preferable but imperative, to the entire exclusion of all others. All preferences which are not enforced by exclusive convictions are to be abandoned. Sprinkling is not exclusively enforced by the consciences of any, because immersed persons are everywhere fellowshipped. Sprinkling therefore ought to be laid aside.

The obligation to submit to immersion would be imperative, even if it involved a perpetual sacrifice of enjoyment. How much more imperative the duty when a single act of self-sacrificing concession on the part of each individual once in a lifetime, secures the perpetual harmony and fellowship of a vast fraternity of Christian believers? If some delicious, daily pleasure had to be abandoned, it would require a heroic benevolence to resist the oft-repeated solicitations of appetite; but in reference to baptism, one vigorous plunge settles the matter forever, and removes all possibility of doubt and misgiving. If the consciences of all could not be satisfied, there would be some room for

hesitation in regard to giving up a favorite practice; but since the harmony can be complete as well as universal, every friend of Union should seek to exterminate the root of disaffection. There is no need of prolonged discussion. Union on all the more palpable points of disagreement is possible. Why should the hosts of Zion be longer divided? Why should unregenerate men be left to stumble over the needless dissensions of Christians? Why should the social interests of our race be longer scorched by sectarian animosity? Why should the millions of India be left to perish without the word of life, when the men and means that are now absorbed in consequence of unproductive rivalries at home might dispense to them the way of life? The still small voice that comes down from the bending skies, the secret throb that pulsates in many regenerate hearts, and the Macedonian cry that comes over the waters from far off isles and nations is summoning the followers of Jesus to Union. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

THE END.



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